A Man for the Ages

A Story of the Builders of Democracy

By Irving Bacheller

BIM SAVES HARRY.

Synopsis.—Samson and Sarah Traylor, with their two children, Josiah and Betsey, travel by wagon in the summer of 1831 from their home in Vergennes, Vt., to the West, the land of plenty. Their destination is the Country of the Sangamon, in Illinois. At Niagara Falls they meet a party of immigrants, among them a youth named John McNeil, who also decides to go to the Sangamon country. All of the party suffer from fever and ague. Sarah's ministrations save the life of a youth, Harry Needles, in the last stages of fever, and he accompanies the Traylors. They reach New Salem, Illinois, and are welcomed by young Abe Lincoln and others. Among the Traylors' first acquaintances are Lincoln's friends, Jack Kelso and his pretty daughter Bim, sixteen years of age. Samson decides to locate at New Salem, and raises his cabin. Led by Jack Armstrong, rowdies make trouble. Lincoln thrashes Armstrong. Harry Needles strikes Bap McNoll, who threatens vengance.

CHAPTER V—Continued.

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Harry felt the beauty of the scene but saw and enjoyed more the face of Bim Kelso as he worked and planned his own house—no cabin, but a mansion like that of Judge Harper in the village near his old home. He had filled every crevice in the rear wall and was working on the front when he heard the thunder of running horses and saw figures, dim in a cloud of dust, flying up the road again. He thought of the threat of Bap McNoll. It occurred to him that he would be in a bad way alone with those ruffians if they were coming for revenge. He thought of running toward the grove, which was a few rods from the rear door of the house, and hiding there. He couldn't bear to run. Bim and all the rest of them would hear of it. So with the sickle in his right hand he stood waiting inside the house and hoping they wouldn't stop. They rode up to the door and dismounted quietly and hobbled their horses. There were five of them who crowded into the cabin with McNoll in the lead.

"Now, you young rooster, you're goin' to git what's comin' to you," he growled.

The boy faced them bravely and warned them away with his sickle. They were prepared for such emergencies. One of them drew a bag of bird shot from his pocket and hurled it at Harry's head. It hit him full in the face and he staggered against the wall stunned by the blow. They rushed upon the boy and disarmed and bore him to the floor. For a little time he knew not what was passing. When he came to, his hands and feet were tied and the men stood near cursing and laughing, while their leader, McNoll, was draining a bottle. Suddenly he heard a voice trembling with excitement and wet with tears saying:

"You go 'way from here or I'll kill you dead. So help me God I'll kill you. If one o' you touches him he's goin' to die."

He saw Bim Kelso at the window with her gun leveled at the head of McNoll. Her face was red with anger. Her eyes glowed. As he looked a tear welled from one of them and trailed down the scarlet surface of her cheek. McNoll turned without a word and walked sulkily out of the back door. The others crowded after him. They ran as soon as they had got out of the door. She left the window. In a moment the young men were galloping away.

Bim came into the house sobbing with emotion but with her head erect. She stood her gun in a corner and knelt by the helpless boy. He was crying also. Her hair fell upon his face as she looked at the spot of deep scarlet color made by the shot bag. She kissed it and held her cheek against his and whispered: "Don't cry. It's all over now. I'm going to cut these ropes."

It was as if she had known and loved him always. She was like a young mother with her first child. Tenderly she wiped his tears away with her blond, silken hair. She cut his bonds and he rose and stood before her. Her face changed like magic.

"Oh what a fool I've been!" she exclaimed.

"Why so?" he asked.

"I cried and I kissed you and we never have been introduced to each other."

She covered her eyes with her hair and with bent head went out of the door.

"I'll never forget that kiss as long as I live," said the boy as he followed her. "I'll never forget your help or your crying either."

"Go away from me—I won't speak to you," she said. "Go back to your work. I'll stay here and keep watch."

The boy returned to his task pointing up the inside walls but his mind and heart were out in the sunlight talking with Bim. Once he looked out of the door and saw her leaning against the neck of the pony, her face hidden in his mane. When the sun was low she came to the door and said:

"You had better stop now and go home."

She looked down at the ground and added:

"Please, please, don't tell on me."

"Of course not," he answered. "But I hope you won't be afraid of me any more."

She looked up at him with a little smile. "Do you think I'm afraid of you?" she asked as if it were too absurd to be thought of. She unhitched and mounted her pony but did not go.

"I do wish you could raise a mustache," she said, looking wistfully into his face. "I can't bear to see you look so terribly young; you get worse and worse every time I see you. I want you to be a regular man right quick."

He wondered what he ought to say and presently stammered: "I—I—intend to. I guess I'm more of a man than anybody would think to look at me."

"You're too young to ever fall in love, I reckon."

"No, I'm not," he answered with decision.

"Have you got a razor?" she asked.

"No."

"I reckon it would be a powerful help. You put soap on your lip and mow it off with a razor. My father says it makes the grass grow."

There was a moment of silence during which she brushed the mane of her pony. Then she asked timidly: "Do you like yellow hair?"

"Yes, if it looks like yours."

"If you don't mind I'll put a mustache on you just—just to look at every time I think of you."

"When I think of you I put violets in your hair," he said.

He took a step toward her as he spoke and as he did so she started her pony. A little way off she checked him and said:

"I'm sorry. There are no violets now."

She rode away slowly waving her hand and singing with the joy of a bird in the springtime.

That evening when Harry was helping Samson with the horses he said:

"I'm going to tell you a secret. I wish you wouldn't say anything about it."

Samson stood pulling the hair out of his card and looking very stern as he listened while Harry told of the assault upon him and how Bim had arrived and driven the rowdies away with her gun but he said not a word of her demonstration of tender sympathy. To him, that had clothed the whole adventure with a kind of sanctity so that he could not bear to have it talked about.

Samson's eyes glowed with anger. They searched the face of the boy. His voice was deep and solemn when he said:

"This is a serious matter. Why do you wish to keep it a secret?"

The boy blushed. For a moment he knew not what to say. Then he spoke: "It ain't me so much—it's her," he managed to say. "She wouldn't want it to be talked about and I don't either."

Samson began to understand. "She's quite a girl, I guess," he said thoughtfully. "She must have the nerve of a man—I declare she must."

"Yes-sir-ee! They'd 'a' got hurt if they hadn't gone away, that's sure," said Harry.

"We'll look out for them after this," Samson rejoined. "The first time I meet that man McNoll he'll have to settle with me and he'll pay cash on the nail."

Bim, having heard of Harry's part in Abe's fight and of the fact that he was to be working alone all day at the new house, had ridden out through the woods to the open prairie and hunted in sight of the new cabin that afternoon. Unwilling to confess her extreme interest in the boy she had said not a word of her brave act. It was not shame; it was partly a kind of rebellion against the tyranny of youthful ardor; it was partly the fear of ridicule.

So it happened that the adventure of Harry Needles made scarcely a ripple on the sensitive surface of the village life. It will be seen, however, that it had started strong undercurrents likely, in time, to make themselves felt.

The house and barn were finished, whereupon Samson and Harry drove to Springfield—a muddy, crude and growing village with thick woods on its north side—and bought furniture. Their wagon was loaded and they were ready to start for home. They were walking on the main street when Harry touched Samson's arm and whispered:

"There's McNoll and Callyhan."

The pair were walking a few steps ahead of Samson and Harry. In a second Samson's big hand was on McNoll's shoulder.

"This is Mr. McNoll, I believe," said Samson.

The other turned with a scared look.

"What do you want o' me?" he demanded.

Samson threw him to the ground with a jerk so strong and violent that it rent the sleeve from his shoulder. McNoll's companion, who had felt the weight of Samson's hand and had had enough of it, turned and ran.

"What do ye want o' me?" McNoll asked again as he struggled to free himself.

"What do I want o' you—you puny little coward," said Samson, as he lifted the bully to his feet and gave him a toss and swung him in the air and continued to address him. "I'm just goin' to muss you up proper. If you don't say you're sorry and mean it I'll put a tow string on your neck and give you to some one that wants a dog."

"I'm sorry," said McNoll. "Honest I am! I was drunk when I done it."

Samson released his prisoner. A number in the crowd which had gathered around them clapped their hands and shouted, "Hurrah for the stranger!"

A constable took Samson's hand and said: "You deserve a vote of thanks. That man and his friends have made me more trouble than all the rest of the drinking men put together."

"And I am making trouble for myself," said Samson. "I have made myself ashamed. I am no fighting man. I was never in such a muss on a public street before and with God's help it will never happen again."

"Where do you live?" the officer asked.

"In New Salem."

"I wish it was here. We need men like you."

Samson wrote in his diary:

"On the way home my heart was sore. I prayed in silence that God would forgive me for my bad example to the boy. I promised that I would not again misuse the strength He has given me. In my old home I would have been disgraced by it. The minister would have preached of the de-

"I'm Just Goin' to Muss You Up Proper."

struction that follows the violent man to put him down; the people would have looked askance at me. Deacon Somers would have called me aside to look into my soul, and Judge Grandy and his wife would not have invited me to their parties. Here it's different. A chap who can take the law in his hands and bring the evil man to his senses, even if he has to hit him over the head, is looked up to. It's a reckless country. You feel it as soon as you get here. In time, I fear, I shall be as headlong as the rest of them. Some way the news of my act has got here from Springfield. Sarah was kind of cut up. Jack Kelso has nicknamed me 'The man with the iron arms,' and Abe, who is a better man every way, laughs at my embarrassment and says I ought to feel honored. For one thing Jack Armstrong has become a good citizen. His wife has foxed a pair of breeches for Abe. They say McNoll has left the country. There has been no devilry here since that day. I guess the gang is broken up—too much iron in its way."

Sarah enjoyed fixing up the cabin. Jack Kelso had given her some deer and buffalo skins to lay on the floors. The upper room, reached by a stick ladder, had its two beds, one of which Harry occupied. The children slept below in a trundle bed that was pushed under the larger one when it was made up in the morning.

"Some time I'm going to put in a windletrap and get rid o' that stick ladder," Samson had said.

Sarah had all the arts of the New England home maker. Under her hand the cabin, in color, atmosphere and general neatness, would have delighted a higher taste than was to be found on the prairies, save in the brain of Kelso, who really had some acquaintance with beauty. To be sure the bed was in one corner, spread with its upper cover knit of gray yarn harmonizing in color with the bark of the log walls. A handsome dark brown buffalo robe lay beside it. The rifle and powder horn were hung above the mantel. The fireplace had its crane of wrought iron.

Every one in the little village came to the house warming. The people were in their best clothes. The women wore dresses of new calico—save Mrs. Doctor Allen, who wore a black silk dress which had come with her from her late home in Lexington. Bim Kelso came in a dress of red muslin trimmed with white lace. Ann Rutledge also wore a red dress and came with Abe. The latter was rather grotesque in his new linsey trousers, of a better length than the former pair, but still too short.

"It isn't fair to blame the trousers or the tailor," he had said when he had tried them on. "My legs are so long that the imagination of the tailor is sure to fall short if the cloth don't. Next time I'll have 'em made to measure with a ten-foot pole instead of a yardstick. If they're too long I can roll 'em up and let out a link or two when they shrink. Ever since I was a boy I have been troubled with shrinking pants."

Abe wore a blue swallow-tail coat with brass buttons, the tails of which were so short as to be well above the danger of pressure when he sat down. His cowhide shoes had been well blackened; the blue yarn of his socks showed above them. "These darned socks of mine are rather proud and conceited," he used to say. "They like to show off."

He wore a shirt of white, unbleached cotton, a starched collar and black tie.

In speaking of his collar to Samson, he said that he felt like a wild horse in a box stall.

Mentor Graham, the schoolmaster, was there—a smooth-faced man with a large head, sandy hair and a small mustache, who spoke by note, as it were. Kelso called him the great articulator and said that he walked in the valley of the shadow of Lindley Murray. He seemed to keep a watchful eye on his words, as if they were a lot of schoolboys not to be trusted. They came out with a kind of self-conscious rectitude.

The children's games had begun and the little house rang with their songs and laughter, while their elders sat by the fire and along the walls talking. Ann Rutledge and Bim Kelso and Harry Needles and John McNeil played with them. In one of the dances all joined in singing the verses:

I won't have none o' yer weevily wheat,
I won't have none o' yer barley;
I won't have none o' yer weevily wheat,
To make a cake for Charley.

Charley is a fine young man,
Charley is a dandy,
Charley likes to kiss the girls,
Whenever it comes handy.

When a victim was caught in the flying scrimmage at the end of a passage in the game of Prisoners, he or she was brought before the blindfolded judge:

"Heavy, heavy hangs over your head," said the constable.

"Fine or superfine?" the judge inquired.

"Fine," said the constable, which meant that the victim was a boy. Then the sentence was pronounced and generally it was this:

"Go bow to the wittiest, kneel to the prettiest and kiss the one that you love best."

Harry was the first prisoner. He went straight to Bim Kelso and bowed and knelt, and when he had risen she turned and ran like a scared deer around the chairs and the crowd of onlookers, some assisting and some checking her flight, before the nimble youth. Hard pressed, she ran out of the open door, with a merry laugh, and just beyond the steps Harry caught and kissed her, and her cheeks had the color of roses when he led her back.

The "Underground Railroad."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

City Has Endowed Flagstaff.

There is an endowed staff in the United States, that on the common at Lawrence, Mass. At the time of the Lawrence strike some years ago, when many indignities were shown to the American flag, there was held a flag parade of 40,000 persons, each carrying a flag as a protest. A public-spirited citizen, Joseph Shattuck, offered to erect a flagstaff and to set aside funds, the interest on which would buy flags for the staff. The city of Lawrence accepted the offer, and today on its common is one of the finest flagstaffs in the world.

There's a Reason.

Nell—"Is it really true that you're going to divorce Bob?" Bella—"Yes, I'm tired of being alone."

Life is measured not by its years but by its enthusiasms.